Appendix B

Visual Resource Management Classification Process

Five steps are involved in the visual resource management (VRM) classification process. These are: 1) outlining and numerical evaluation of scenic quality; 2) outlining of visual sensitivity levels; 3) delineating distance zones; 4) overlaying the scenic quality, sensitivity levels and distance zones using a matrix to develop visual resource inventory classes (VRI) I-IV; and 5) adjusting the inventory to meet the multiple use goals of the RMP and designating VRM management classes I-IV with objectives for each class through the planning process.

SCENIC QUALITY

The first step is accomplished by outlining scenery of similar nature on a topographic map. Once the area has been outlined, numerical values are given to its key factors (landform, color, water, vegetation, adjacent scenery, scarcity, and cultural modifications). When these values are established the total determines whether the area is A, B, or C, class scenery.

Class A scenery combines the most outstanding characteristics of each rating factor. Class B scenery combines some outstanding features and some that are fairly common to the physiographic region. Class C scenery combines features that are fairly common to the physiographic region.

VISUAL SENSITIVITY LEVELS

Sensitivity levels indicate the relative degree of user interest in visual resources and concern for changes in the existing landscape character. Public lands are assigned high, medium, or low sensitivity levels by analyzing the various indicators of public concern. Factors considered are the type of use, amount of use, public interest, adjacent land use, special areas, and other factors.

DISTANCE ZONES

The distance zones are outlined on topographic maps in three areas: (1) foreground/middleground, (2) background, and (3) seldom seen. The foreground/middleground zone is a distance of from 0 to 5 miles away. The background is the remaining area up to 15 miles distant, and seldom seen is the area beyond 15 miles. All distances are taken from any substantial travel corridor.

VISUAL RESOURCE INVENTORY CLASSES

Inventory classes are informational in nature only and are assigned through the inventory process. Class I is assigned to those areas where a management decision has been made previously to maintain a natural landscape. This includes areas such as national wilderness areas, the wild section of national wild and scenic rivers, and other congressionally and administratively designated areas where decisions have been made to preserve a natural landscape. Class II, III, and IV are assigned based on a combination of scenic quality, sensitivity level, and distance zones. This is accomplished by combining the scenic quality, sensitivity levels, and distance zones maps, using a matrix (see BLM H-8410-1) to assign the proper inventory class.

VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CLASSES

Management classes are assigned through Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The assignment of visual management classes is ultimately based on the management decisions made in the RMPs. However, visual values must be considered throughout the RMP process. All actions proposed during the RMP process that would result in surface disturbance must consider the importance of the visual values and the impacts the project may have on these values.

Management decisions in the RMP must reflect the value of visual resources. In fact, the value of the visual resource may be the driving force for some management decisions. For example, highly scenic areas, which need special management attention may be designated as scenic Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and classified as VRM class I based on the importance of the visual values (see Figure 2 for current VRM inventory classes).

OBJECTIVES FOR VISUAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CLASSES

Class I Objective. The objective of this class is to preserve the existing character of the landscape. This class provides for natural ecological changes; however, it does not preclude very limited management activity. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and should not attract attention.

Class II Objective. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Class III Objective. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Class IV Objective. The objective of this class is to provide for management activities, which require major modification of the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the view and be the major focus of viewer attention. However, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements of the landscape.

(BLM 1992)